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Labour as social movements



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Mobilizing against all odds



**ASSEMBLEA
PUBBLICA
SCIOPERO**

Presidio MONDO CONVENIENZA
martedì 18 luglio ore 19:00
in via Gattinella a Campi B.zio



Mobilizing against all odds



Little interactions as

- Fantasia and Stephan Norris (1996): what made also difficult for social movement studies to study unions was that, indeed, for a long time, **unions did not functioned as social movements**
- Beverly Silver and Şahan Savaş Karataşlı (2016), “The mainstream of the social movement literature since the 1990s has in large measure **dismissed the concept of ‘capitalism’** from its toolkit for understanding social movements, while at the same time placing ‘labor movements’ outside its field of inquiry”.

And yet...

- “capital does indeed recurrently relocate geographically in search of cheaper or more docile labor but **ends up creating new working classes and new rounds of labor-capital conflict in each favored site of production**” (Silver)
- “**new groups which are not, or do not feel themselves to be, represented as such in the existing system express a collective will to be represented**” (Pizzorno 1978)

What **social movement studies** can offer

- Not only *preexisting* resources: **power in action**
- Not only *strikes*: **eventful protests**
- Not only *unions*: The organizational dimension: **networking in action**
- Not only *economic* struggle: **Intersectional conflicts**
- Not only *exchange*: **solidarity building**

eventful protests

- as **capable of transforming relations** within social movements and between movements and their contexts (della Porta, 2004, 2014).
- reproduce, rather than just consuming, **resources of solidarity** and collective identification, fueling positive emotions of empowerment.
- the perception of time accelerates, as what had seemed impossible now appears possible

organizing beyond organization

- Associational power
- Coalitional power
- Ideational power

- Territorially rooted



Associational resources

- "We were occupying since July 2021, we were already a little bit equipped, while they at Mondo Convenienza were camped out in front, so we gave logistical support for hot meals, to have breakfast, if they wanted to come for a shower. Then little by little we also entered their world, so we started to do things, then also prepare for evenings together, in collaboration, maybe we would cook at the pickets and then go in front of Mondo Convenienza" (Int 13 **GKN Factory Collective**).
- 'Throughout the month of August, many **Arci** circles supported the strike by organising and delivering dinners to the workers on the picket line, demonstrating once again how every form of exploitation affects everyone and everyone, hence the entire territory"

Coalitional resources

- "Because if you are together, you bring the dinner, you eat together... [...] a process of **mutual knowledge** and interesting integration was really created there' (Int. 4 Arci Florence)
- 'it was as if there was a **possibility for those outside the struggle**, however, to come and listen and be told what was happening by the people who were putting the struggle into practice" (Int. 4 Arci Florence).

Ideational resources

After 50 days of strike by the workers to demand fair contracts, humane working hours, safety in their workplaces, an end to harassment; After yesterday's regional round table attended by the Region of Tuscany, the Campi Bisenzio Municipality, SI Cobas Prato and Florence, Filcams CGIL Toscana, Filt Cgil Toscana, RSU Contacta and at which the company did not even deign to present itself; After the disturbing and unacceptable occupation of Piazza Dante of the company vans; After the very participated assembly in front of the warehouse gates; Campi has decided which side he's on!!! ... Now more than ever there is a need for a collective effort for this dispute and for **the rights of all**

Identity formation

There is a category of action which may be observed in social conflicts, that can be understood only if it is asked of them **not what gains and what losses they will produce for the actors, but whether they produce solidarity** or not. These are the actions connoting a process of formation of a **collective identity**” (Pizzorno)

“The real end is non-negotiable, since it consists in the **formation of the very subject which has successively to become the actor** of the exchange and the bearer of gains and losses.



Chain resonates with the existence of several moments of contestation, which are loosely connected like the rings in a chain

different, loosely connected actors have used various repertoires of action to target the company within evolving collective frames, and how they have interacted with the counter-strategies employed by the company.

diffusion (Tarrow 2010; Givan et al. 2010; Soule 2004, 2013; Soule and Roggeband 2018) in terms of

- The **conditions** for diffusion (della Porta and Mattoni 2014)
- **Channels** for diffusions (Oliver and Myers 2003)
- **Effects** of diffusion (Roggeband 2007)

	Number of campaigns	Location	Workplace	arena	Movement Players	Unions	Action repertoire	Organizational structure	Collective framing	Outcomes
Ring 1 (2013-2016)	5	Civitavecchia (2); Campi Bisenzio; Pescara; Calderara di Reno	Warehouse (4); store (1)	The firm	Workers and the main unions	USB (1); CISL (1); UIL (1)	Strikes, litigation	Local, in the firm	recognition of specific claims	Sporadic success, repression of active workers
Ring 2 (2017-2022)	10	Settimo Torinese; Calderara di Reno; Rimini; Montichiari; San Giuliano Milanese; Civitavecchia; Venezia; Gorgonzola	Warehouse (9); store (1)	The firm plus institutions	Workers, the main unions and grassroots unions	CISL (1); CGIL (5); UGL (1); Si Cobas (1)	Strikes, litigation, and demonstrations	Local, with external ties	Recognition of rights	Limited success, with increasing ties
Ring (2023)	3	Campi Bisenzio; Riano; Calderara di Reno; Settimo Torinese	Warehouse (4)	Firms Institutions Plus, the local area	Workers, the main & grassroots unions, and solidarians	Si Cobas (4); CGIL	Strikes, demonstrations, picketing, assemblies, cultural events	Rooted in the local area but also regional and national	Recognition of locally rooted values	Loose coordination across the local area



Ring 1 - the emergence of protest in a number of workplaces

Mobilizations were 1) fragmented; 2) with no geographical spread; 3) with no capacity to build on past experiences.

Despite some specific concessions, **Mondo Convenienza's response** to the protests during this phase reflected the approach it would take in later mobilizations, with a **consistent refusal** to address workers' demands

"there was one person dedicated to union meetings. [...] But after pushing and pushing, you never got anywhere. Never, never, never. [...] He was a rubber wall with a smile printed on it"

Ring 2 - Moving outside the workplace

Mobilizations: more systematic involvement of union actors enabled more complex strategies, with shift towards broader action at the institutional level: strike and picketing; demonstration in front of institutional offices, particularly prefectures (the decentralized organ of government); Naming and shaming. Sporadic success in some areas

The company's reaction was selective. On the one hand, rebellious workers were punished, while on the other hand, essential workers, were offered particularly advantageous financial incentives to stop striking.

Intensified outsourcing, with frequent contract changes that allowed companies to re-negotiate contract terms downwards, often introducing unique company-specific regulations (contracts with more flexibility)



Ring 3 - Mobilizing in the locality

The entrenchment of the **grassroots** unions and the increased presence of **mainstream** unions facilitated **greater interaction between workers across different branches**

Five **key innovations** have emerged:

- a) the organization of more long-lasting strikes and a picket line;
- b) solidarity support from associations, groups and individuals;
- c) the diffusion of struggles across different locations (Settimo Torinese, Calderara di Reno, Riano), also thanks to new media;
- d) the prominence of a single union (SI Cobas)
- e) the involvement of regional authorities in managing the dispute (as well as local the authorities, albeit in a marginal form) alongside the establishment of a joint consultative committee at the national level.

In this regard, the success of the mobilization was closely linked to the ability of the strike in **Campi Bisenzio to serve as a model that could be emulated.**



Ring 3 - Mobilizing in the locality

Continuous adaptation between the strategies of the unions — both traditional and grassroots — and the counter-strategies employed by the company

The strategy of *Mondo Convenienza* and its contracted cooperatives has largely remained **consistent with previous phases**, including actions such as filing complaints against protesters and deploying trucks and staff from other warehouses to bypass picket lines.

Innovation: while workers continued to picket outside the warehouse, the company organized a **counter-demonstration in front of the local government headquarters**, demanding the removal of the picket

After the interruption of the strike, the the dispute continued exclusively through the joint consultative committee at the national level, between confederal unions and the employers' association and ended with an agreement

We have observed a **process of progressive learning**, both on the part of workers and union representatives and on the part of *Mondo Convenienza*

An important element of perceived similarity and identification was **belonging to the same firms; identify themselves as a community of struggle**

However, **the unions played a key role in building on memories of past successes and failures**, and in strengthening the capacity to connect workers in different parts of the country

Building networks with actors located elsewhere, also thanks to the use of innovative strategies and media

Combination of resources and opportunities that were both related to the workplace and external to it.



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Harboring collective
identification.
The dockers of Genoa
mobilizing for Gaza



harbouring of identities as, during the protests, a conception of the self is built by rooting today's struggles in past memories, connecting the workers to the city, and building networks from the local to the transnational level.

- how collective identifications develop in the course of a struggle
- how the commitment against the genocide in Gaza builds upon existing traditions but also innovates through the bridging of different frames

“If Israel will not let this humanitarian help be delivered to the Palestinian population in Gaza, not a single nail will any longer go to Israel from this harbour” (Dockers, 30th August 2025, Genoa)

The dockers—with their CALP (Autonomous Collective of Port Workers) and the unions (USB)—are at the core of a mobilisation against war which turned into one for Free Palestine. The protest has triggered a coalition of organizations of very different types, from labour (overcoming competition among unions) to the educational system (putting together different student groups), catholic and lay pacifist associations.

In support of the flotilla, thousands of citizens brought 5 times the expected amount of food.



The aim is to analyse

Going beyond the construction of solidarity with an international cause, we want to explore how the mobilization against arm trafficking and in support of human rights are connected with concerns about security on the labour place.

We suggest the concept of

Conceptualizing ports:

- Ports as relevant (and unique) economic and political spaces
- Peculiar relationship between ports and cities (Carpenter and Lozano, 2020)
- Ports as simultaneously “territories” and “markets” (Sergi and Storti, 2021)
- Ports as securitized spaces, formally forbidden for non-authorized persons

Contentious politics in ports:

- historically sites of contentious politics at local and international levels (Davies et al. 2017)
- the potential of dock workers to significantly disrupt the trade of goods (Fox-Hodess 2022)
- Mobilizations are successful when local conflicts are framed in a global context AND respond to foreign or international pressures within domestic politics to shift the scale of contention (Turnbull 2010)
- since dockers are connected through the global supply chain, they have considerable incentive to mobilize transnationally (Gentile and Tarrow 2009)



Collective identification in action

Various links between collective action and collective identities: pre-existing identities become relevant for the **rise of mobilisation** processes and **action produces new collective identities** (Polletta and Jaspers 2001)

strikes can be conducive to class consciousness and worker solidarity (Hyman 1975)

As Fantasia (1988) suggests “**cultures of solidarity**” are **constructed by workers during the course of and as a result of their struggles**

Struggles for recognition: for struggles to occur a preliminary process of group identification among workers is necessary, one that was favoured by their daily interactions in the physically delimited space of the factory (Pizzorno 1978)

Collective identity is a process which must be understood in a **relational** manner as a social construction of **the actors that repeat and innovate cultural frames and codes while acting collectively**.



Consciousness, solidarity, and collective identification are forged in action yet anchored in deep sediments of memory and local traditions

A long-standing commitment to oppose arms logistics—predating the current Gaza cycle but transformed by it—has been revived and recomposed through the idiom of “harbouring identities”: **identities that take root in the port as a workplace and civic space, while also “anchoring” ethical claims** about safety

What emerged is a positive self-representation of dockers and allies that counters growing stigmatization of the harbour by reframing it as a site of responsibility, care, and rights.

Networks are build in practice, while trust accumulated across repeated episodes and transnational exchanges with other ports

Back to Rosa Luxemburg: solidarity in action

“The most precious, lasting, thing in the rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its **mental sediment**: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle....

The circumstances, the conditions, of capitalist development and of the bourgeois state make it impossible that, in the normal course of things, without **stormy class struggles**, certain sections – and these the greatest, the most important, the lowest and the most oppressed by capital, and by the state – can be organised at all” (Luxemburg 1906)



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